

A SENSE OF PLACE

By

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## A SENSE OF PLACE

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### *Abstract*

The concept of “place” is a mental construction that we, as humans, create to give importance to a location. The experience of authentic human attachment to an environment is a phenomenon *all* people can relate to. Through interactions with a location we give significance to it and imbue it with meaning. Place, in turn, identifies us and gives our lives continuity.

“*Sense of Place*” is an installation that draws inspiration from locations that have influenced me. I have come to understand these sites through my physical interactions with and observations of the landscape. These localities are stored in my memory in a series of mental maps. In this installation, I have selected and combined certain mental maps of places that have played a significant role in shaping who I am. By combining these several locations into one landscape I have created a new place; a place which reflects where I come from, where I draw inspiration from, and consequently, a place to better understand who I am. I have created a “sense of place,” in which I can further contemplate, reflect, and explore who I am and remember how I got there.

The term “place” is a mental construction that we give to a location that has, either through personal or cultural reasons, significance to us. Our interaction with a location gives that place meaning, consequently place gives meaning to our interactions.

Locations that I explored as a youth are places which hold great significance. We identify ourselves through an understanding of place - not only our literal location but also where and how we fit into our environment, culture, society, and the world landscape. We define ourselves through areas we associate with. Everyone finds a sense of place in their own way. I experience it through physically exploring the spaces around me.

Nature and natural landscapes are where and how I find my “place”. Nature is my escape, a haven from stress, an environment in which to focus, and my greatest source of inspiration. My current work is a reflection and culmination of many of the spaces and landscapes I have found comfort in. I define myself through places I have explored and discovered; managing, through this exploration and discovery to find a deep connection with certain locations. How I connect to an environment and make it a “place” is both a physical and emotional process. By wandering through nature, I not only study its marvels and mysteries but the act of wandering also allows me time to reflect intrinsically on my sense of place. Graduate school has been a struggle for me to find myself. The combination of a foreign environment, a separation from familial ties and ties to places which I thought defined me contributed to my sense of loss. I felt adrift with nothing to tie me to the people around me much less the actual physical location in which I found

myself. I was lost. It was not until I reached out to new natural landscapes and started self-reflecting again that I became aware of this fact. I was seeking a place. I was seeking comfort, security, and, in short, a sense of homecoming that had been missing since leaving my family and the landscapes of my childhood.

The works I make as an artist are based on observations and interactions with nature that have come to represent personal significance for me; either a noteworthy experience or from habitual familiarity. My works, along with nature, contain elements of discovery. However, the beauty and power of nature cannot be replicated. So, in my artwork, I did not seek to not duplicate locations in topographical accuracy, but rather, represent them in such a way that the audience walks along the path of memories with me and consequently, experiences the “sense of location” as *I* remember experiencing them. Rather than studiously surveying a map I survey the land through my body. My legs record every step I take, and my eyes document and take in the landscape. A map cannot record the experience of seeing the sun crest over the hills at sunrise, or the coolness of a stream beneath my feet. A map cannot capture walking through a spider’s sticky web or reclining in the roots of a tree. It is through these memories that I intuitively crafted my work. By *re*-creating the landscapes, I am celebrating my connection to these separate locations.

Steel, my media of choice, was a very physically demanding material to work with. As I labored, I realized the physical journey of creating the work reminded me of the journey and exploration of the original landscapes which inspired the work. I was

physically drawing the landscape in three dimensions, forcing the steel into shape, and “drawing” from my memories.

### *Steel*

I chose to create this piece from steel out of conceptual, aesthetic and practical reasons. Steel has certain physical characteristics which made it the ideal material for this work. Strength, durability, and fluidity were aspects of the material which appealed me to it. The strength of the steel allowed for the supports of the structure to be minimized. This permitted the horizontally linear elements to become the focal element of the work. The fluidity of the material and its strong linear quality are akin to the drawing style I utilize. The weight of the horizontal lines changes subtly throughout the installation as would a line drawing change depending on pencil pressure, thereby creating lines of varying visual weight. Change in line weight helps to visually move the viewer through the piece. The lines thin in areas of steep terrain and slow, or thicken, in more gradual slopes.

Besides the physical strength of the material, steel also fits conceptually. There is an inherent permanence in steel. It is a material that can withstand the elements and time. The steel sections that make up the installation are bolted together. These sections being joined into one piece continues the concept of creating one landscape from several different places. The lines of the sculpture flow into the wall, suggesting that there is a continuation of the work beyond the gallery walls. The gallery can only contain a portion

of this place which defines me. I am inviting the viewer to explore part of the journey to find what defines me as a person and as an artist.

### ***Floor***

The linear vinyl designs on the floor are a continuation of the steel lines. Where the lines of steel meet the floor the piece transforms from three dimensions into two dimensions. The design on the floor radiates out from the piece and utilizes most of the floor space of the gallery. By covering the floor, the viewer is forced to interact with the work. Because of the closeness in color, the vinyl does not stand out and is a subtle aspect of the installation. This subtleness permits a sense of discovery in the work the viewer can partake in. Depending on the angle of the light, the lines disappear and blend into the floor. Through the inherent subtleness of the two dimension lines, a possibility for discovery is created for the viewer. Some viewers, by the time they notice the lines on the floor, are already enveloped in the landscape. They discover themselves to be active participants in my journey rather than passive observers. By using subtle lines I am inviting the viewer into a shared experience.

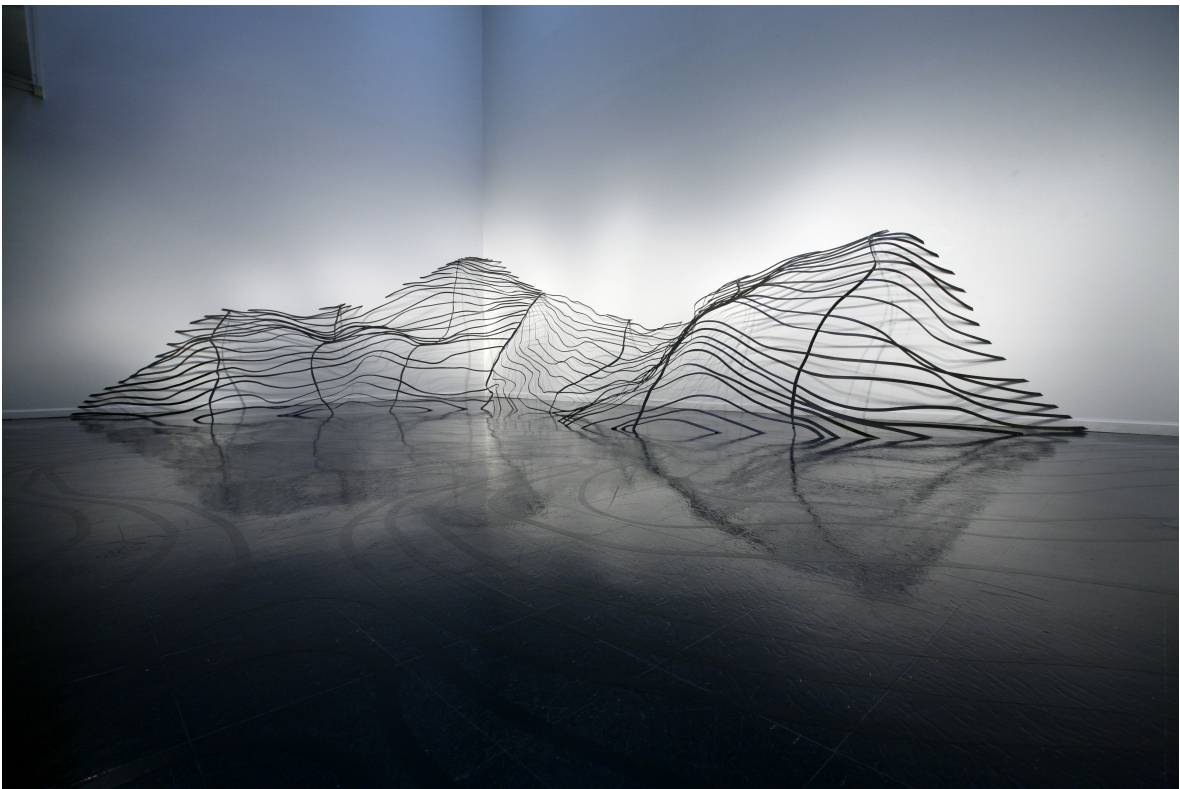
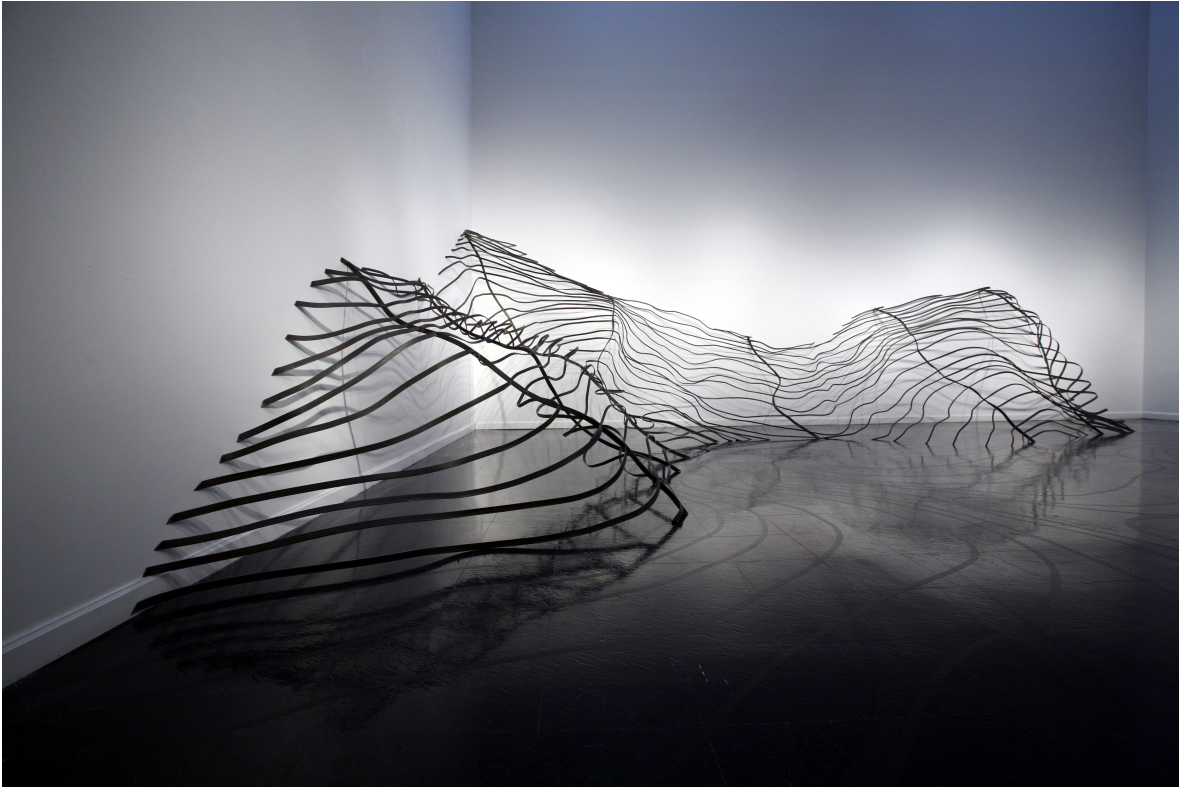
### ***Shadows/Reflections***

The piece consists of a variety of different linear elements. Besides the steel and vinyl elements, there are also many shadows and reflections upon both the walls and the floor. The shadows and reflections of the work are contained inside the piece. As viewers interact with the work their shadows and reflections also become part of the piece. Because viewers are already interacting with the piece through the two

dimensional lines, their shadows and reflections help draw their attention to the fact that they are an active participant in my landscape. In the broader view, people are always a part the landscape but rarely take notice of the fact until they see their shadow or reflection upon it. We are then made aware of our own presence and can begin to see our connection to that place.

As the exterior of the work is a public space of discovery and interaction, the interior, in contrast, is a private place. The interior space of the piece is my own space for further contemplation, reflection, and exploration. Juxtaposition of public and private space gives me an avenue to meditate on both intrinsic and extrinsic discovery.

The work in the gallery is an attempt to understand place and how it identifies and defines us. I want viewers to explore the work and become more aware of the places that they come in contact with. It is through exploration that we discover not only ourselves but a realization of how humans come to connect with their surrounds and each other.



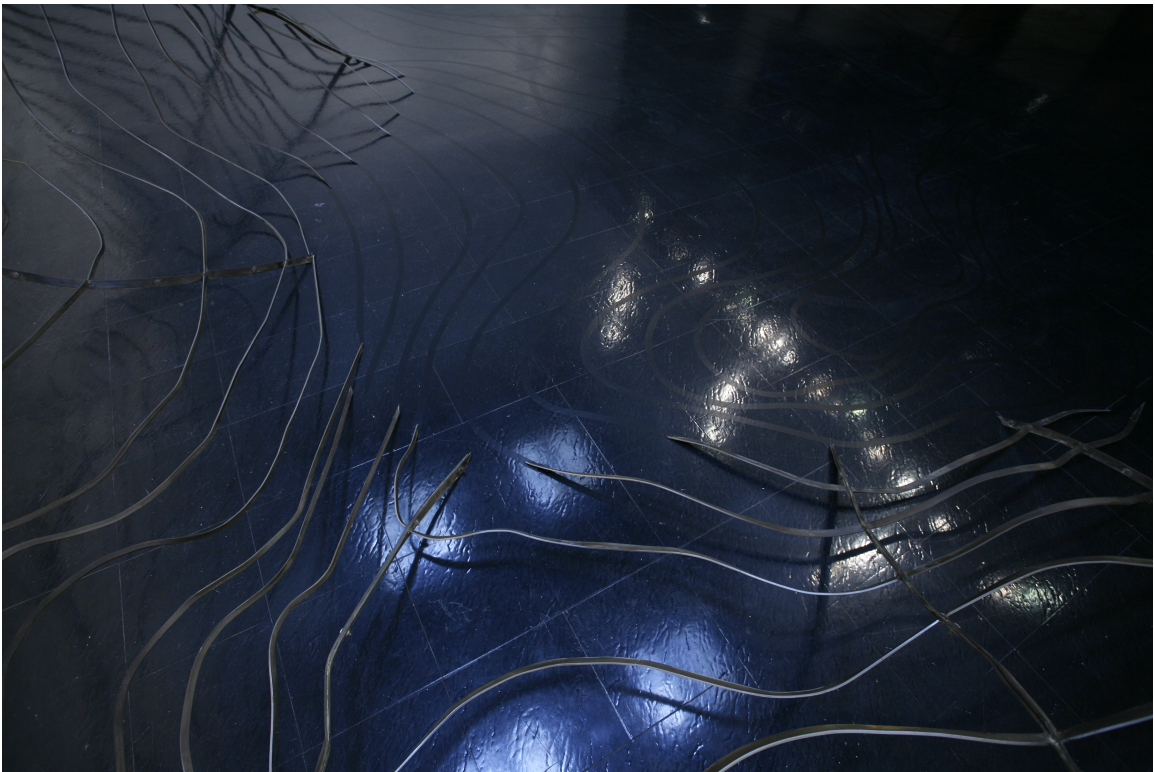
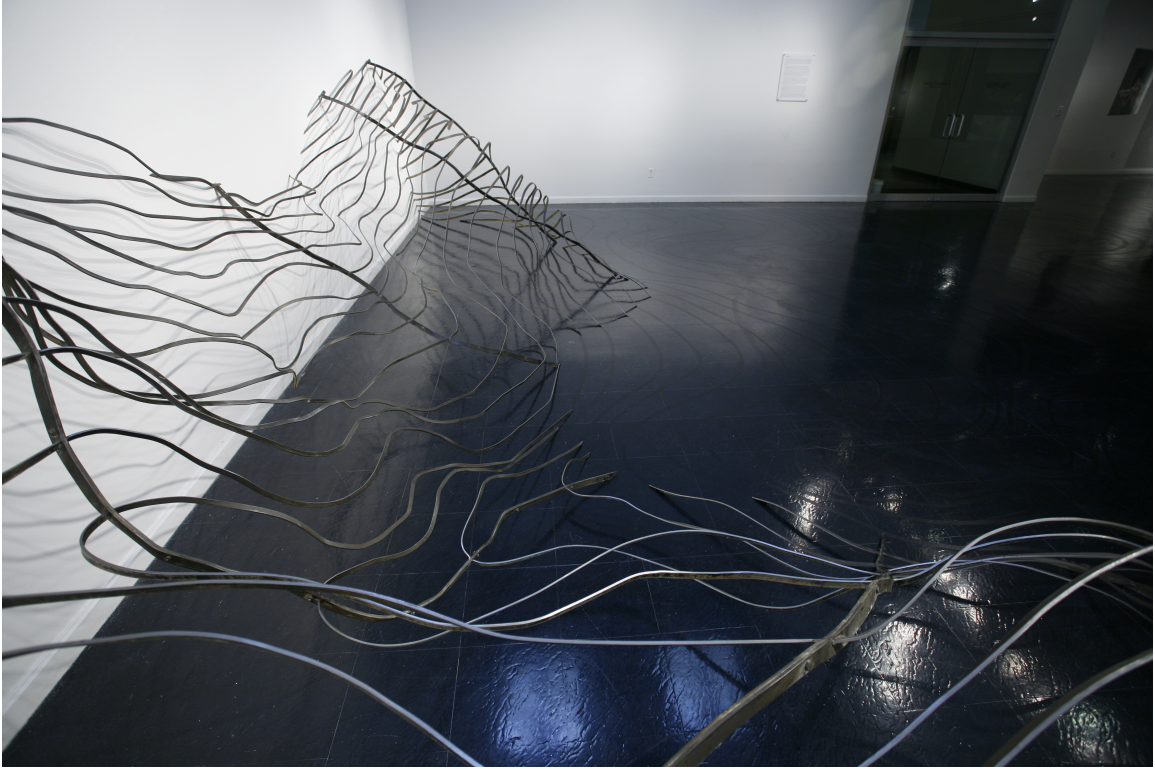
*Installation views*





*Installation views (detail)*





*Steel merging with floor*





*Reflections*



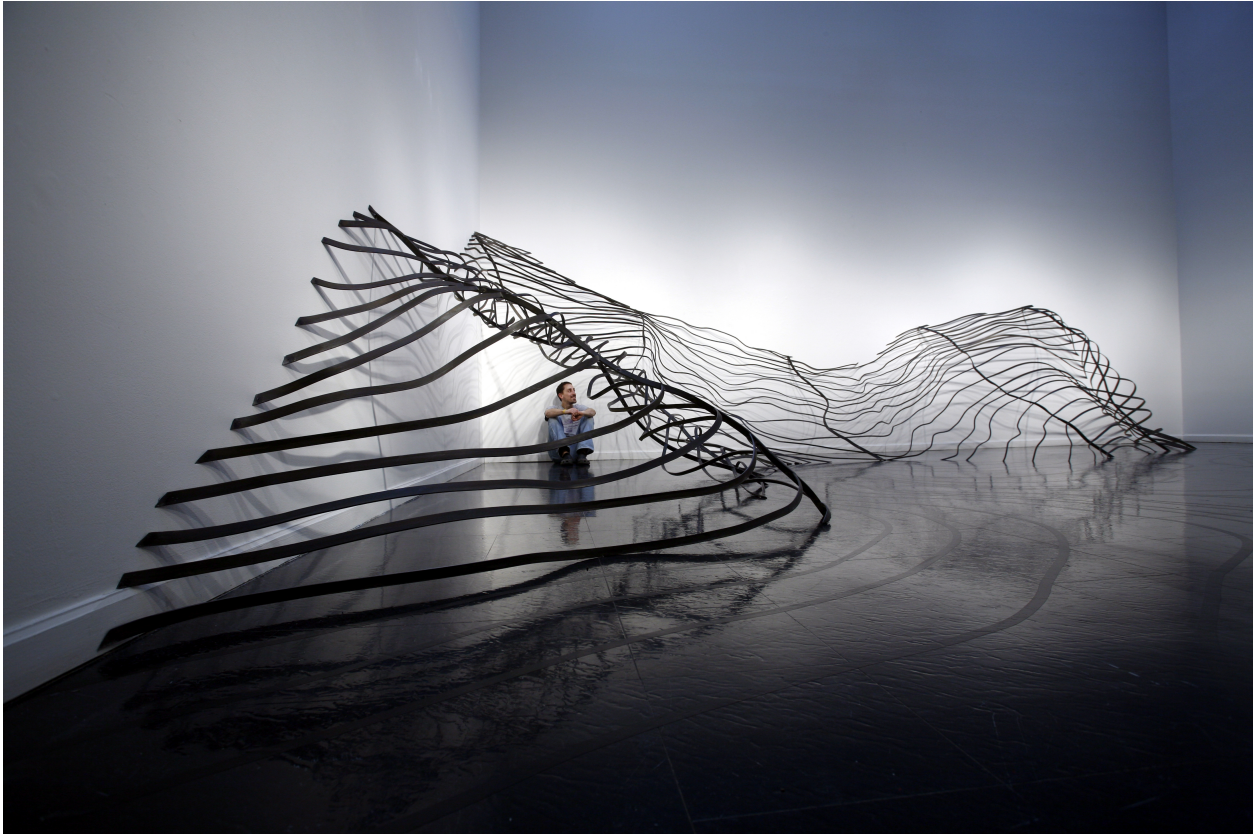


*Floor detail*





*Interior*



*My place*





*Shaping steel*



*Bolting sections together*



*Climbing up to work on the piece*